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ABSTRACT

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), characterized by disguises, secrecy, bigotry, and terror, came into power in the South after the Civil War. In some parts of the country the KKK, an extreme example of pathological group process, appears as strong and violent today as ever. Fromm (1941) noted that the basis of group psychology is the individual personality and defined social character as that part of the individual character structure that is common to most members of a group. The dynamics of the KKK may be better understood in terms of the individual psychodynamics of the group members. In the process of maturation, individuals need to progressively transfer to some matrix the feelings of support that they originally felt with their mothers. Because society as a whole is too vast and remote to meet this need, individuals seek additional support through group membership. The split-mother concept of Klein's (1975) Object Relations Theory can be projected into group life. Some individuals experience the maternal presence of society as split and have special requirements for group support. Under certain circumstances, pathological groups like the KKK may meet those requirements. In addition, the eruption of group violence of the KKK type may be explained by analyzing the psychodynamics of group regression to an infantile level and the accompanying arousal of the "unmanageable mother." (Author/NRB)

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PSYCHODYNAMICS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

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ABSTRACT

The conspicuous and peculiarly ruinous behavior of the Ku Klux Klan may provide an example of psychosocial pathology that can be usefully analyzed via an extension of object relations theory. This paper employs the Kleinian concept of the split maternal presence, and advances the theoretical hypothesis that this split is projected into group life. Some individuals experience the "maternal presence" of society as split and have special requirements for group support. Under certain circumstances, pathological groups like the KKK may meet those requirements. In addition, the eruption of group violence of the KKK type may be explainable by analyzing the psychodynamics of group regression to an infantile level and the accompanying arousal of the "unmanageable mother."

Introduction

The experience of "collective consciousness" and its uncanny, coercive power to influence and direct the actions of otherwise self-determining individuals offer a thought-provoking area of inquiry. A relatively extreme example of this experience is provided by the psychic pathology, social processes, and conspicuously destructive activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Extreme examples like this one may be useful in shedding light on psychological and psychosocial processes that remain obscured (but not necessarily inoperative) under more normal circumstances. Such an example is well worth study.

The Ku Klux Klan is an organization that came to power in the South after the Civil War. The term Ku-Klux is derived from the Greek word kuklos, which means circle (Randel, 1965). The etymon of the name Ku Klux Klan refers to a social circle. Over the years, Southerners have occasionally associated the organization's name with the sound of a gun being cocked.

The Klan was founded in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866 as a secret society to fight against Reconstruction after the Civil War, to protect home and womanhood, and to maintain white supremacy (Shelton, 1968). War veterans, who made up a majority of the organization, began to use the Klan to terrorize blacks. Disguises, secrecy, bigotry, and terror came to characterize organizational activities.

In 1871, its violent methods caused Congress to pass a bill that gave the President power to move against the KKK as a conspiracy that threatened national security. The Klan seemed to disappear, but a revived KKK reappeared in force about 1915 and spread throughout the United States, reaching as many

as four to six million members. Its virulent activities were directed against Blacks, Jews, Catholics, radical groups, and foreigners. At times, these people became victims of cross burnings, tar and featherings, floggings, mutilations, bombings, and lynchings.

After World War II, Klan organizations from six southern states met to re-establish formally a national organization, and to become a more prominent public force. Its more recent "militant activities" were prompted by the U. S. Supreme Court decision to outlaw racial segregation in public schools. In some parts of the country, the KKK appears to be as strong and as violent in the middle 1980's as it was at any time in the past.

Meetings of the white hooded and white robed Klansmen are usually held at night. Many of these are non-violent meetings held in halls or peoples' homes and are concerned with organizational business and news. But the most famous gatherings, for which the KKK is best known, are held out of doors in somewhat isolated spots. The crucial symbol of some of these gatherings is a huge, "Fiery Cross" (Shelton, 1968), which in a complicated way seems to represent not only the force and authority of God (the white cross) but also the "flaming zeal" (Shelton, 1968) of unbridled aggression and sexuality (the burning phallus). Clamorous rituals are conceived and conducted in such a way as to produce an emotional contagion, that alters one's sense of reality and lends support to the submersion of the individual into an undifferentiated mass out of which only a commonly held psychic meaning, collective impulses, and a uniform group will can erupt. In such circumstances, it seems that emotional as well as behavioral assent to Klan life produces something like a mystical psychic unity in the membership.

The inner workings of the Ku Klux Klan provide an extreme example of pathological group process. In this paper, we attempt to analyze that group

process in terms of the individual psychodynamics of the group members. The paper develops a line of psychological theory that may be applicable to other sorts of group pathologies as well.

In so doing, we study the psychological experience of social life in the Klan from a standpoint adopted by various theoreticians including Fromm. In his classic work, Escape from Freedom (1941), he notes that the basis of group psychology is the individual personality and goes on to analyze that part of individual character structure that is common to most members of an organization or group. He calls this character the social character.

> The social character comprises only a selection of traits, the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as a result of basic experiences and mode of life common to that group (p. 277).

While we recognize that participants in a group have life circumstances and developmental histories that are quite diverse, it is equally apparent that individual experiences and personal integration level of group members have common characteristics that partially shape and determine the context for group experience and action.

The attempt to relate social processes to individual psychodynamics is always a tentative one. A social group is influenced not only by the shared needs of the individuals who comprise it, but also by political pressures, economic circumstances, cultural traditions, and many other social influences. Moreover, tracing individuals' psychic productions and group activities to a common trauma, as we will do here, will necessarily result in a simplistic explanation of a complex array of phenomena. Nevertheless, our hypothesized relationship between people's psychic processes and their impact upon a group's capacity for action seems worthy of consideration.

The argument that we wish to develop is complex, involving several levels of analysis. For the sake of clarity, we will separate out its strands and discuss each of them in detail, one by one. At the close of the paper, we attempt to bring the strands together.

The Individual in Group Life

A number of psychological motives may lie behind individual participation in group life. Some of them, such as affiliative and friendship needs, apply to group life in general and have only limited relevance to the particular appeal of the Ku Klux Klan; these are not discussed here. There are also certain unconscious motives behind individual participation in group life that are relevant to the particular character of the KKK, but are not part of the argument we wish to advance here. These generally familiar motives need receive only brief mention. All involve unconscious needs for support.

First, the individuals who self-select into the Klan appear to share common traits: aimlessness and personal failure, lack of status and low self-esteem, alienation from the social context and poor adaptation to the requirements of reality (Randel, 1965; Lowe, 1967; Chalmers, 1976). None of these social-psychological traits alone is sufficient for self-selection into the KKK; but when most or all combine, the choice of a pathological group, of which the Klan is one, may well follow.

Second, a way in which society and groups provide individuals with one kind of support is through the sanction of limited levels of regression. Examples are manifold. Shriners, for example, are allowed to act like unruly adolescent boys. The city of New Orleans condones all sorts of limited regressions and public mischievousness during Mardi Gras.

Third, social groups are used by some individuals to reinforce individual psychological defenses against the experience of anxiety (Jaques, 1955; Menzies, 1960). According to this viewpoint, a group may organize itself so that its structure is compatible with specific ego defenses of members.

These needs for participation in some kinds of group life will not be further discussed here.

Another Source of Group Life

In common with many other writers (e.g., Freud, 1910, 1912; Jung, 1922; Bion, 1955, 1961; Klein, 1959; Gibbard, et al, 1974; Winnicott, 1982), we presume that in the process of maturation through late childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, individuals progressively transfer to some matrix the feelings of support, of being enfolded and sustained, that they originally felt with and from their mothers. Freud (1910) initially used the term "imago" to define a psychic representation or model that derives from an infantile object, e.g., the mother.

> ...objects will still be chosen on the model (imago) of the infantile ones, but in the course of time, they will attract to themselves the affection that was tied to earlier ones (p. 181).

Freud (1912) notes, for example, how Nature has been used in literature as an abstraction and substitute of Mother with whom "libidinal" ties are maintained. More recently, Schindler (1966) presents the view that "society as a whole represents the mother image" (p. 199).

We also assume that the matrix represented by society as a whole is not, and cannot be, strong enough and supportive enough to meet completely the developing ego's need for a social Mother Imago. Society as a whole is too vast and too remote. Most of its instrumentalities (for instance, government agencies) must act too impersonally. Hence, the developing ego seeks additional support through participating in various forms of group life.

Evidence of a theoretical nature supports the hypothesis that individuals in groups may experience a social entity as a maternal presence, which hearkens back to infancy (Bion, 1961; Winnicott, 1965; Slater, 1966; Schindler, 1966; Ruiz, 1972; Gibbard, et al, 1974). It is supposed that a social matrix with its significant patterns and rewards, or its discontinuities and frustrations, may possibly provide an important measure of psychic stability, or instability, similar to that which a mother provides her infant. Church or synagogue and clubs associated with them, social clubs such as Rotary, Moose or Shriners, veterans or patriotic organizations, and many other organizations help provide for their members, a source of support that includes a "maternal" presence. Needless to say, this presence is very largely or entirely unconscious.

We do not mean to imply that the need for "maternal" support is the only reason individuals seek to form and join such groups. There are also other needs, such as affiliative and friendship needs, that such groups help meet. Nonetheless, their role as maternal surrogate is one of their raisons d'être, and the dynamic of the individual projecting the Mother Imago onto such groups that he joins, and then experiencing that Imago unconsciously from the group, is one of the bases of group life.

We assume, then, that the normal, developing individual transfers his Mother Imago onto both the society as a whole, and one or more groups in which he participates. Society in its way, and the group(s) in theirs, provide the individual with a sustaining sense of support and "presence." All this is normal and healthy; nothing has been said yet in this analysis about social- or psychopathology. This is, however, necessary background for the analysis of pathology to follow.*

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*Since this essay focuses mainly on a psychopathological entity, the KKK, that is open to white Southerners, we will confine the boundaries of our whole discussion to such individuals and their experience in group life. There are equivalents for this kind of psychic pathology in other sections of the United States, and in other countries.

Object Relations: the split mother

Of the various concepts and approaches that psychoanalysis can suggest, we find most useful for our purposes here the split-mother concept of Klein's Object Relations theory (1975). This theory describes psychic mechanisms and conditions typical of the earliest phases of mental life.

Klein (1952, 1959) hypothesizes that a newborn baby experiences anxiety of a persecutory nature at times when its needs are not being met by the mother. The experience of deprivation and an accompanying sense of frustration give rise to bodily tensions, unpleasant emotions, and fantasies of being persecuted by hostile forces. On the other hand, when the mother relieves the child's bodily tensions by meeting its needs, pleasant emotions and fantasies, and a sense of being comforted by friendly forces are produced. Klein believes that even under the best of circumstances the child has experiences of both amicable and hostile forces. This struggle between "good" and "evil" is thought to be the basis for the conditions of love and hate in later life.

This concept may be applied directly to the evolution of the ego. Klein (1952, 1959) states that the ego exists in an infantile form and operates from birth onward. The infantile ego defends itself by employing primitive psychological mechanisms, which provide for the management of the forces of good and evil. The foremost of these defense mechanisms is "splitting," in which the child's infantile ego produces a perception of the mother as two separate people. One person is good and loved, the other bad and dangerous. The infant directs its positive feelings toward the "part object" identified as the good mother. Conversely, the child expresses its feelings of hostility and frustration to the part object perceived as a bad, unmanageable mother.

Klein (1928, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1945) prepares the ground for the notion that each child is unique, based primarily on the quality and quantity of experiences that give rise to feelings of being involved with a good or unmanageable mother. To the extent that positive experiences and a perceived good mother predominate in the infant's life, favorable psychological development and personal integration are fostered.

If, however, negative experiences and a perceived "bad" and unmanageable mother predominate, negative consequences for psychological development may follow in terms of a failure to achieve personal integration. For the infantile ego, the alienation produced can lead to extreme feelings of hostility. But rather than experience such feelings, the infantile ego resorts to primitive defense mechanisms and adopts what Klein (1946, 1959) terms the "paranoid-schizoid" position. This position is characterized by paranoid anxiety. Even more important for our purposes here, it is also characterized by a profound splitting of objects. The natural split in the child's perception of the mother (as two mothers) becomes deepened and rendered more or less permanent.

Although psychological development, in many other ways, must and does proceed onward, this split in the maternal object may never be healed. Within the timeless unconscious, it continues on. Even in adulthood, the individual, at this level, is continuing, unconsciously, to "experience" a divided maternal object.

A natural consequence of this unhealed breach is that this individual remains unable to separate completely from the mother. Rather than transcending (in part) the need for a maternal presence, as would be normal, such a person continues into adulthood with a greater than normal need for a maternal presence, a need which, of course, remains largely or entirely unconscious.*

The Hypothesis of the Split Mother Imago

The presumptions that the split mother is carried unconsciously on into adulthood and that the individual remains unable to separate fully from the mother are major concepts of Object Relations theory. They have many implications that we need not trace here.

The theoretical hypothesis that we wish to put forward in this paper is that the split mother is also carried over into the projected Mother Imago. That is, the maternal presence represented by society as a whole and/or the maternal presence represented by group life may also be deeply split. A division between an unconscious good mother and an unconscious bad, unmanageable mother is carried on into the Mother Imago and projected by the adult onto society and groups.

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*Another theory of psychological development in infancy and early childhood has been propounded by Mahler (1968, 1976). In it, she describes in a normative sense the unfolding of an intrapsychic process through which mature individuality and personal integration are achieved. Apparently, if this movement (i.e., normal "separation-individuation" as she terms it) breaks down to a greater or lesser degree, then negative psychological consequences will result. Mahler's theory of how the vicissitudes of the mother/child relationship and dyadic consciousness are transformed to individuality and individual consciousness is different in a phenomenological sense from Klein's theory. While Mahler theorizes how psychological development proceeds when all goes well, Klein's theory describes and explains the "broken down universe" of the same developmental process.

Speaking in the abstract, there might be a number of ways the projected split could arrange itself. Much would depend upon the severity of the split, and upon the social and life circumstances in which the individual finds himself. One possibility, that might even be fairly common, but which is relatively unimportant from the social or political viewpoint, is the case where the individual finds society as a whole to be vaguely positive and supportive, certain groups to be negative, unmanageable and threatening, and other groups to be positive and supportive. Presumably individuals who experience this will avoid the threatening groups and seek support from the positive ones.

In this paper, we are interested in exploring a case that may be less common, but may also be more important from the social and political viewpoint, and perhaps more psychologically revealing. That is the case where society as a whole is seriously split and experienced with a strong, perhaps predominant, negative tone, and where one group provides a "defense" against the anxiety this raises. How might this hypothesis apply to the Ku Klux Klan? To explore this, we must briefly review some American social history.

American Society and the Ku Klux Klan

In the South of the Reconstruction era, society as a whole upended, in many ways, the values and social context that white Southerners had been reared on and were used to. The basis for the Klan's activities derived from this social upheaval. Many white southerners were fighting against allowing blacks political rights, and economic and social opportunities. The formerly dominant whites wanted to restore things as they had been before the Civil War, by reinstituting something resembling the political, economic, and social inequalities of the old, stable, hierarchical social order (i.e., the good mother) which had been lost. They had no interest in an uncertain and threatening social context (i.e., the unmanageable, bad mother) where whites might be subjected to "black power," which was perceived as lecherous and violent.

The notion of a profound psychic connection between the feminine principle in life and the traditional Southern social order is not original with us. Cash (1941) would have us

> ...recall the central status that Southern women had long ago taken up in Southern emotion - her identification with the very notion of the South itself (p. 118).

Chalmers (1976) also observes that

> "The /white/ woman not only stood at the core of the white man's sense of property and chivalry, she represented the heart of his culture... Any attack on white womanhood /was/ a blow against the whole idea of the South... (p. 21).:

But Chalmers focused on the carnal aspect of this connection, remarking that "it was impossible to assault either the Southern woman or the South without having levied a carnal attack on the other." Here, we wish to pick up Cash's and Chalmers' connection between Southern womanhood and the traditional Southern social order, but emphasize the maternal, not the carnal, aspect.

We hypothesize that for some white southerners, the loss of their "Old South" social order may have been tantamount to the loss or death of a good mother. Into the breach created by this loss, a new mother in the form of an unmanageable social context was being established. (It is here that we can begin to identify the perceptual split of the primal mother, which is transferred to the social matrix.) In the regressed, momentarily less integrated minds of the Klansmen, the new mother could be likened to Neumann's (1954, 1955) "terrible mother," or to an unmanageable presence, with whom a relationship is not tolerable.

In the contemporary era as well, we believe, American society has proven itself difficult to tolerate, for these whites whose fragile egos require an underclass (blacks and other minorities) to which to feel superior.

Particularly since the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in favor of equal education, liberal American society has increasingly placed emphasis on social equality. The civil rights movement that began in the 1960's, and many government programs implemented then and since, have been aimed at this equality. It is reasonable to suppose that this powerful strand in contemporary American society must be experienced as quite negative by the individual who is potentially attracted to the KKK. For such individuals, the social matrix as a whole must be experienced as polarized -- containing both positive elements ("good, traditional Americanism," as such individuals define it) and negative elements (liberal equalitarianism).

But we recall that the major theoretical hypothesis of this paper is that some individuals are already experiencing a severely split Mother Imago in society at large. They are carrying a split maternal presence into adulthood, and strongly projecting that split onto society. We believe that these cleavages meet and join: for many racist white Southerners, the split Mother Imago aligns itself with the split between racist and anti-racist halves of the surrounding social order. The supportive maternal presence represented by the Old South becomes identified with the "good mother", and the threatening, equalitarian element of today's society with the "bad mother."

The Psychological Basis of the Contemporary KKK

An individual experiencing this split unconsciously must necessarily be rendered permanently anxious and threatened by life in American society. It is natural for such an individual to turn to some group, and to active participation in the group's life, for psychological support to withstand the pressure.

The Ku Klux Klan embodies symbols and meanings that provide the needed support. For the individual threatened by a split mother in the form of a split society as a whole, the KKK bolsters that part which is positive from the

viewpoint of the racist white. That is, the Klan symbolizes, and explicitly preaches, a White Supremacist social order evocative of the Old South, and a mutually supportive bond among the white members that excludes the rest of society.

The Klan makes its meaning clear by declaring that the only person who may join is "a White male Gentile person, a native-born citizen of the United States..." and by making repeated references in its key documents to promoting "klannishness" as a central goal.* Indeed, "faithful devotion" to klannishness is the fourth of a four-point Klan "Kreed." The first two points make obeisance to God and the U.S. Constitution, while the third point of the Kreed states the KKK's racist purpose quite explicitly, as follows:

> "We avow the distinction between the races of mankind as same has been decreed by the Creator, and we shall ever be true in the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy and will strenuously oppose any compromise thereof in any and all things."**

The core meanings of "klannishness" and white supremacy are repeated often throughout KKK documents and rituals.

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*Constitution Article IV, in the Kloran, p. 38, 39, et seq.

**Kreed of the United Klans of America, p. 4.

For people other than white Southerners, these meanings would not necessarily evoke impressions and images of an entire social order, but for a white Southerner they must, and especially so for racist white Southerners. A strong sense of the Old South as a quite different, and far more supportive, kind of society continues today for whites (outside urban areas especially) -- an object of deep ambivalence for non-racists but almost an unalloyed attraction for racists.*

The explicit fundamentals of white supremacy and "klannishness" in the KKK are elaborated by a mythology that during Reconstruction, the white culture was threatened by attack from the outside by alien elements, and from within by blacks. The imagery surrounding this mythology can be extremely vivid, as illustrated by these extracts from "Lecture Number One" of a basic KKK set of "Instruction":

> When the shuddering peals of the thunder of the impending storm of the American Reconstruction were heard above the fading echoes of the battles of the great Civil War, the chosen victims stood aghast and pale, wondering at the meaning and purpose of the gathering gloom.
>
> Darkness gathered apace, and the demons were loosed from hell's most dismal depths: the blighting hand of devastation complete was laid heavy upon the Southern people,----a people pauperized, bleeding, prostrated and defenseless.

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*To a degree that might surprise many other Americans, a sense still survives strongly in the southern U.S. that "the South" once represented a distinctly different social order and culture from anything that has existed elsewhere or since. This sense includes a complex mixture of perceptions of what that social order once meant and what Southern culture means today -- including, even for non-racist whites, many positive perceptions involving "hospitality", "graciousness", "charm" and less conscious perceptions of nurturance. Unconscious symbolism involving a maternal presence has been widely remarked. Among many white Southerners, there is a strong unconscious, and even conscious, ambivalence about the antebellum South, which simultaneously represents institutionalized slavery, yet also the original and purer form of all that is felt to be positive (Cash, 1941; Chalmers, 1976).

> Carpetbaggers, the vultures of gluttonous greed, swooped down from their aerie on the lofty peaks of the mountains of national authority over the dismal plain of human helplessness, fastened their tortuous talons in the fleece of defenseless innocence, and consumed with avaricious avidity the vital flesh of the people's sustenance; and the scallawags--------the conscienceless, cadaverous wolves of treason-------gnawed the bones remaining to a baleful state of ghastly bleaching.

From this point, the "lecture" turns immediately to the carnal theme, invoking extreme racism:

> The chastity of the mother, wife, sister and daughter was imperiled and their sacred persons were placed in jeopardy to the licentious longings of lust-crazed beasts in human form. Might ruled over Right. Life and living was made intolerable; the rasping, discordant notes of penury had displaced the heavenly harmony of domestic happiness and no man's home was secure.
>
> ...The very blood of the Caucasian race was seriously threatened with an everlasting contamination.

Although imagery this vivid can scarcely be matched by the routine oratory of regular KKK meetings, reports indicate that such talks seek to evoke the supposed order and harmony of the Old South, and the need to maintain White Supremacy to protect core values (Chalmers, 1976; Thompson, 1982).

We argue, then, that one psychological role the KKK plays for its members is to evoke the "good mother" by providing organized, powerful reminders of the Old South social order and the positive maternal presence it represents for them. It also bolsters the weak egos of individuals made anxious by a society that to a considerable degree threatens that symbolism and presence, by providing a "klannish" group in which members can feel supported and safe.

It would be a mistake to regard the KKK belief system as a cynical exercise --mere political posturing-- by all concerned. However cynical some KKK leaders may be in manipulating the membership, detailed and reliable accounts attest to many members' heartfelt, even childishly sincere, beliefs (e.g., Cash, 1941; Randel, 1965; Lowe, 1967; Chalmers, 1976; Thompson, 1982).

It would also be a mistake to regard the KKK belief system or activities as illogical or chaotic. There is an elaborate superstructure of doctrine that is reasonably consistent, and an even more elaborate set of rituals, which in many ways resemble the "secret" rituals of more harmless organizations like the Shriners or Masons. Governance and doctrine are presented in a "sacred book" called the Kloran, which candidates for membership are, at least in principle, supposed to study and partially memorize. The Kloran is a lengthy document that includes a Kreed, a diagram of a proper Klavern (meeting hall), a constitution, list of officers, order of business for meetings, and approved rituals for ordaining members and for other ceremonies. Far from being solely a collection of night-riders, therefore, the KKK includes in its beliefs and activities an element intended to appeal to the rational, logical side of the psyche.

Since a number of fraternal organizations exist that possess similar elements, however, this aspect of the KKK's appeal does not explain why individuals would seek to join the Ku Klux Klan in particular. To account for the appeal of the KKK, we advance the suggestion that white Southerners with a seriously split Mother Imago "need" the support such a group can provide. We hypothesize, in short, that for many members of the KKK, the group and the group's life provide a badly-needed <u>positive</u> maternal presence, that helps offset the <u>negative</u> half of the larger, social (and split) maternal presence.

This is a hypothesis for why such individuals might join a racist group. But it is not -- yet -- a hypothesis for why this group's gatherings sometimes erupt into violence. In fact, accounts and studies of the Ku Klux Klan (Cash, 1941; Chalmers, 1976; Thompson, 1982) show that some individuals who join the Klan remain peripheral members, and that some are attracted by the KKK and condone its activities but do not join; such individuals generally do not participate in the violence. It may be that the reasoning presented up to this point explains (at least from this point of view) these non-violent, but silently consenting and interested individuals. They seek the sustenance of the positive maternal presence, to offset the anxiety-provoking aspects of the larger social order and its split Mother Imago. But they find this support to be all that they need, perhaps because their ego defense mechanisms are relatively stronger than violent KKK members, perhaps because they succeed in finding opportunities to sublimate and to compensate in other directions, and perhaps for other reasons.

Clearly, some KKK members <u>do</u> want to engage in group violence. To account for this, we must carry our analysis further.

<u>The Submergence of the Individual and the Eruption of Violence</u>

Perplexing questions emerge about the psychology of groups in which there may be an unconscious diminution of individual identity, and about the nature of the impact of these groups on the persons involved in them (LeBon, 1895; Bion, 1955, 1961; Redl, 1952, 1969; Janis, 1959, 1972; Hughes, 1962; Gibbard, et al, 1974). Freud (1921) provided an insightful description of group life.

> The psychology of a group, as we know it from descriptions to which we have often referred--the dwindling of the conscious individual personality, the focusing of thoughts and feelings into a common direction, the predominance of the affective side of the mind and of unconscious psychical life, the tendency to the immediate carrying out of intentions as they emerge--all corresponds to a state of regression to a primitive mental activity...(p. 122).

It appears that in certain situations the individual disappears into the group, and out of the admixture of personalities a social entity emerges which harbors afflictions of a collective mind.* In other words, before the individual disappears into the group, his experience could be characterized as being, to an important degree, willful, active, separate, productive, and consciously self-aware. After joining the group, personalities are largely bereft of will, passively receptive, less differentiated and productive, and oriented toward a collective consciousness. Jung (1938) describes this transformation of personality in a dramatic way.

> The change of character that is brought about by the uprush of collective forces is amazing. A gentle and reasonable being can be transformed into a maniac or savage beast. One is always inclined to lay blame on external circumstance, but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there... It is a good thing to preach reason and common sense, but what if your audience is a lunatic asylum or a crowd in a collective seizure? There is not much difference either, because the madman as well as the mob is moved by nonpersonal, overwhelming forces (pp. 16-17).

A mob in a "collective seizure" is an apt description of some Klan night meetings. After a period of stirring speechmaking before a giant burning cross at midnight, the group may "fire-up" itself to the point where the hooded "night riders" are ready to ride off to do their dirty work.

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*The experience of diminished consciousness and capacity is not an occurrence in all groups. The literature on groups is replete with theory and research on achievement-oriented groups in which individuals maintain their personal identities and accomplish goals associated with productive work tasks. See especially the work of Thelen and Stock, 1953; Mann, 1959; McGregor, 1960; Argyris, 1962; Zander, 1963, 1965, 1968; Rice, 1965; and Turquet, 1974.

In this situation, mature options for coping with individual infantile wishes are closed off by the group primitivization of consciousness. Regressive personal proclivities within the individuals coincide with infantilizing social processes and ideologies of the group, to sanction a primitivization of consciousness and behavior.*

It is important to understand exactly how this process operates and how violence may erupt out of it. An important contribution was made by Slater (1966) when he identified two aspects in the primitivized group. On the one hand, the submergence of the individual ego into the group produces euphoria in the individual. On the other hand, the submergence of the ego into the group also may threaten the ego with boundary dissolution. This threat to the ego produces feelings, often not admitted to consciousness, of anxiety, and hostile fantasies. In either case, overwhelming feelings prompt changes in one's sense of reality.

A common way that groups cope with the negative feelings is by the well-known process of scapegoating. The hostility each member is feeling is deflected from the group itself by being projected onto some negative object, which the group then treats with punitive measures. Certainly this outcome is part of some KKK rallies. But further explanation is needed.

It seems that in KKK night rallies, individuals revel for a while in a positive, carnival-type, good-mother group atmosphere, and then "flip over," become fearful and hostile, and in a less than fully human way go off into the night to do their dirty work.

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*As Jung (1938) noted, some very deeply disturbed individuals do not require the impact of destabilizing group processes to prompt and sanction a primitivization of consciousness and behavior.

A psychological explanation for this rapid shift certainly seems needed. If the group experience made its members only feel good, there would be no sudden urge to violence. After several hours in a highly regressed, euphoric, "good mother" state, everyone would simply go home, temporarily feeling better about life and themselves. Instead, there is an eruption of hostile emotions and accompanying violent acts.

We observed earlier that a group such as the KKK becomes a maternal presence for its members, offering support against the threatening aspects of the larger society. The warmth, closeness, security, and belongingness that Slater (1966, p. 186) noted some individuals feel in group experiences are feelings that a positive maternal presence provides.

But, the basic hypothesis of this paper is that individuals with primitive ego structures operative, who are unconsciously still experiencing a split mother, will project a split maternal imago onto both society and their group life. That is, the KKK group gives rise to both the positive and negative experiences of members' relationship to a primal mother. Then, the "bad", unmanageable mother is projected onto the liberal equalitarian social order, while the "good" mother is projected onto the KKK group and, by extension, the "Old South."

The night meetings of the Klan create a primitivized state of consciousness among the participants. But when individuals regress to an infantile level of psychological functioning, everything associated with that level is experienced. We believe that even though these deprived individuals come together in groups to re-experience the positive, all-loving mother, that very attempt at re-experiencing tends unconsciously to arouse the experiences of the negative, depriving, unmanageable mother.

When the members of the group under its influence regress back to the level when primitive psychic mechanisms such as splitting are operative and at a maximum height, they will concurrently reactivate both sides of the ambivalent relationship to the primal mother. During the "carnival" phase, the leaders speak to the group about the positive values of the traditional social order (e.g., the "harmony" of society when whites were in control). That is, the words spoken further amplify the unconscious imagery of the "good mother." But the regressed level of the experience guarantees that the "unmanageable mother", equivalent to the modern, threatening equalitarian social context, is also being amplified. The Klansmen are being reminded of what they hate in the act of being reminded of what they love. Their fear and hostility are rising, unconsciously, along with their conscious euphoria.

It seems that as infantilization accelerates and both the good and bad maternal presences are intensifying, a point is reached when a discharge becomes possible and necessary. Both maternal presences are, as it were, supplying energy. The euphoric feeling associated with the good mother is bolstering the Klansman's weak ego strength to a point where he can ride off to take action. The anxious, hostile feelings associated with the unmanageable mother are impelling him, to a point where he must ride off and take action.

Needless to say, it is far too threatening to attack the powerful, equalitarian, 'nigger-loving' social order directly, or to confront a figure who is actually as monstrous or powerful as the image of the unmanageable mother suggests. The only target that is psychologically feasible (because it is non-threatening) is a relatively defenseless, isolated member of a hated minority who can readily become a target for heretofore repressed hatred and fury. Hostility toward such a threat is acted out against a symbol or

representative of it (just as a child may act out against a doll, hostility toward the unmanageable mother).*

This dynamic appears to account adequately for why a positive, carnival-like mood, which includes relatively little overt hostility, turns ugly and violent (sometimes rather quickly). Only after these anomic, low self-esteem, rather weak individuals experience, in a highly regressed state, the combined impulse of the bolstering, positive maternal presence and the threatening, negative presence, can they act. Then hooded night riders ride off to do their dirty work.

Summary

We have put forward an explanation for the psychodynamics -- or at any rate one dimension of psychodynamics -- that underlie the conspicuous and peculiar behavior of the Ku Klux Klan. Our explanation incorporates several levels, all of which depend on two central ideas. First, we employ the Kleinian concept that the infantile ego splits the maternal presence into a good and bad mother and, if it experiences too much of the bad, carries that split on, unconsciously, into adulthood. Second, we introduce the idea that this split maternal presence is projected into group life.

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*In a similar vein, Comfort (1950) recognizes in group delinquency the relationship between certain primary aspects of the mother/child relationship and many essential elements of psychopathology in group life, noting specifically, for example, that individual aggressiveness stems from early life interactions.

> The atmosphere of the nursery, with its securities and insecurities, of being in the hands of those who know best, is recreated. The genuine fear and hatred of aggression under such conditions cannot disguise its primary satisfactions. The person is placed in the same situation toward forbidden acts of aggression as the chld who is suddenly given the run of the forbidden room... After such an orgy, return to reality is as painful as continuance in danger (p. 50).

Employing the well-know principle that the social order as a whole functions as a maternal presence for individuals, we suggest that when that social order (presence) is seriously split, the deprived and "persecuted" individual finds himself in distinctly greater need of support from a group, than more normal individuals do.

Some white Southerners, no doubt especially ones with weak ego strength and few meaningful social supports, equate images of the traditional (and racist) Southern social order with the positive maternal presence, and the modern, equalitarian social order, with the negative one. Since they are already projecting a split maternal presence onto society, that split and the traditional/equalitarian social cleavage meet and join.

The KKK is available to these individuals as a group that affirms the traditional social values. It therefore can provide the support, on the "positive" maternal side, that these weak egos need.

This is an explanation for why such people may be attracted to the KKK, and hence why the KKK exists and continues, but it is not an explanation for the special form of KKK group violence. For that, the further principle is needed of psychological regression in collective consciousness.

The night gatherings are well-designed to encourage a severe regression in psyches that already have distinct regressive proclivities. On these occasions, the group experience recreates a warm maternal presence, experienced as highly positive.

But these individuals are "carrying" a seriously split mother. Regression to an infantile level will evoke, even if unconsciously, the negative presence (bad mother) and hostility, anger, and fear. During the carnival phase of the

night rallies, these feelings are unconsciously rising in tandem with the conscious warmth and belongingness. The former drives the men to action when the latter has bolstered them sufficiently to make action possible. They ride off to do "dirty work" against scapegoats -- representatives, but defenseless ones, of the presence that is hated.

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